

# Choctaw language

The **Choctaw language**, traditionally spoken by the Native American Choctaw people of the southeastern United States, is a member of the Muskogean family. Chickasaw, Choctaw and Houma form the Western branch of the Muskogean language family. Although Chickasaw is sometimes listed as a dialect of Choctaw, more extensive documentation of Chickasaw has shown that Choctaw and Chickasaw are best treated as separate but closely related languages.<sup>[3]</sup>

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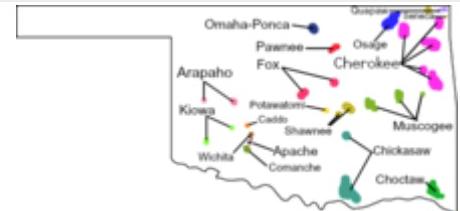
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<b>Choctaw</b>	
<i>Chahta</i>	
<b>Native to</b>	United States
<b>Region</b>	from Southeastern Oklahoma, to east central Mississippi and into Louisiana and Tennessee
<b>Ethnicity</b>	20,000 Choctaw (2007) <sup>[1]</sup>
<b>Native speakers</b>	9,600 (2015 census) <sup>[1]</sup>
<b>Language family</b>	Muskogean <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Western</li> <li>▪ Choctaw</li> </ul>
<b>Language codes</b>	
<b>ISO 639-2</b>	cho ( <a href="https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?code_ID=88">https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?code_ID=88</a> )
<b>ISO 639-3</b>	cho
<b>Glottolog</b>	choc1276 ( <a href="http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/choc1276">http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/choc1276</a> ) <sup>[2]</sup>



Distribution of Native American languages in Oklahoma

Noun suffixes

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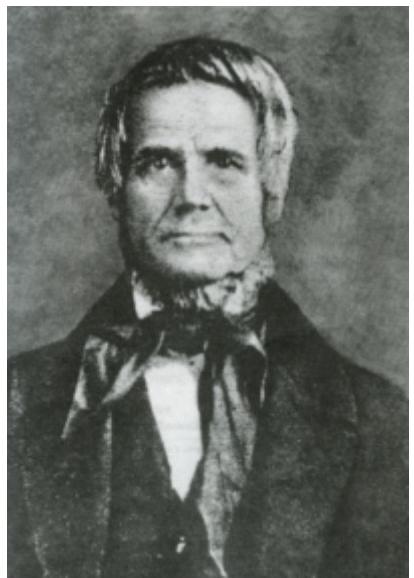
**External links**

## Orthography

The written Choctaw language is based upon the English version of the Roman alphabet and was developed in conjunction with the civilization program of the United States in the early 19th century. Although there are other variations of the Choctaw alphabet, the three most commonly seen are the Byington (Traditional), Byington/Swanton (Linguistic), and Modern (Mississippi Choctaw).

Many publications by linguists about the Choctaw language use a slight variant of the "modern (Mississippi Choctaw)" orthography listed here, where long vowels are written as doubled. In the "linguistic" version, the acute accent shows the position of the pitch accent, rather than the length of the vowel.

The discussion of Choctaw grammar below uses the linguistic variant of the orthography.



Rev. Cyrus Byington worked nearly 50 years translating the bible into Choctaw. He stayed with the Choctaws in Mississippi before removal and followed them to Indian Territory after their forced relocation.

	Nasalized	Diphthongs
A U B Ch E F H I K L H M N O P S Sh T U W Y	A I O U	Ai Au
a u b ch e f h i k l h m n o p s sh t u w y	a i o u	ai au

The Choctaw "Speller" alphabet as found in the *Chahta Holiso Ai Isht la Ummona – The Choctaw Spelling Book*, 1800s.

	Nasalized	Diphthongs
A Á B Ch E F H I K L L M N O P S Sh T U W Y	A <sup>n</sup> I <sup>n</sup> O <sup>n</sup> U <sup>n</sup>	Ai Au
a á b ch e f h i k l l m n o p s sh t u w y	a <sup>n</sup> i <sup>n</sup> o <sup>n</sup> u <sup>n</sup>	ai au

The Choctaw linguistic alphabet as found in the *Choctaw Language Dictionary* by Cyrus Byington and edited by John Swanton, 1909.

A Á A Ai B Ch E F H I Í I K L Lh M N O Ó O P S Sh T W Y

a á a ai b ch e f h i í i k l lh m n o ó o p s sh t w y

The Modern Choctaw alphabet as used by the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, Present.

IPA	Linguistic	CBTC <sup>[1]</sup>	Mississippi	Traditional	Byington/Swanton
<b>Vowels</b>					
a			a		
i			i		
o			o		
<b>Long</b>					
a:	aa	á	á ā		a
i:	ii	í	í ī		e, i
o:	oo	ó	ó ō		o
<b>Nasal</b>					
ã:	a	a	a	a	a <sup>n</sup>
+C				am, an	
ĩ:	i	i	i	i	i <sup>n</sup>
+C				im, in	
õ:	o	o	o	o	o <sup>n</sup>
+C				om, on, um, un	
<b>Lax</b>					
ə	a		u <sup>[2]</sup>		ə
I		i			
ʊ	o		u		
<b>Consonants</b>					
b		b			
tʃ	ch	č		ch	
f		f			
h		h			
k		k			
l		l			
ɿ	lh	ɿ	hl, lh <sup>[3]</sup>	ɿ, lh <sup>[4]</sup>	
m		m			
n		n			
p		p			
s		s			

ʃ	sh	š	sh
t		t	
w		w	
j		y	
?	'		∅

1. ^ Choctaw Bible Translation Committee
2. ^ Substituted with 'v' according to typesetting or encoding constraints.
3. ^ The former is used before a vowel; the latter, before a consonant. The intervocalic use of <hl> conflated the common consonant cluster /hl/ with /ɬ/.
4. ^ Dictionary editors John Swanton and Henry Halbert systematically replaced all instances of <hl> with <l>, regardless whether <hl> stood for /ɬ/ or /hl/. Despite the editors' systematic replacement of all <hl> with <l>, the digraph <lh> was allowed to stand.

## Dialects

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There are three dialects of Choctaw (Mithun 1999):

1. "Native" Choctaw on the Choctaw Nation in southeastern Oklahoma
2. Mississippi Choctaw of Oklahoma on Chickasaw Nation of south central Oklahoma (near Durwood)
3. Choctaw of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians near Philadelphia, Mississippi

Other speakers live near Tallahassee, Florida, and with the Koasati in Louisiana, and also a few speakers live in Texas and California.

## Phonology

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- More information on suffixes is in the Morphology section.

## Consonants

	Labial	Alveolar		Palatal	Velar	Glottal
		central	lateral			
<u>Nasal</u>	m	n				
<u>Stop</u> <sup>1</sup>	p b	t			k	? <sup>2</sup>
<u>Affricate</u>				ch [tʃ]		
<u>Fricative</u>	f	s <sup>3</sup>	ɬ	sh [ʃ <sup>3</sup> ]		h
<u>Approximant</u>			!	y [j]	w	

1. ^ The only voiced stop is /b/. The voiceless stops /p/, /t/, and /k/ may become partially voiced between vowels, especially /k/ and for male speakers. Also, the voiceless stops are slightly aspirated at the onset of words<sup>[4]</sup> and before stressed syllables, behaving like English voiceless plosives.

2. <sup>Λ</sup> Controversially, analyses suggest that all nouns end in an underlying consonant phoneme.<sup>[5]</sup>  
 Nouns apparently ending in a vowel actually have a glottal stop /ʔ/ or a glottal fricative /h/ as the final consonant. Such consonants become realized when suffixes are attached.
3. <sup>Λ</sup> The distinction between phonemes /s/ and /ʃ/ is neutralized at the end of words.

## Free variation

- There is free variation of some consonants in Choctaw with some speakers:<sup>[6]</sup>

  - /tɬ/, the voiceless lateral fricative, is pronounced as a voiceless dental fricative [θ].<sup>[6]</sup>

/tɬ/ → [θ]

- The voiceless labiodental fricative /f/ is pronounced as a voiceless bilabial fricative [ɸ].<sup>[6]</sup>

/f/ → [ɸ]

## Phonological processes of consonants

- In Choctaw /k/, the voiceless velar plosive, is pronounced as [χ], a voiced velar fricative, between vowels.<sup>[4]</sup>

/k/ → [χ]/V\_V

imofi-aki-lih → imofiy-əχə:-lih

- The voiceless glottal fricative /h/ is pronounced like a voiceless palatal fricative [ç] when it precedes the voiceless palato-alveolar affricate /tʃ/.<sup>[4]</sup>

/h/ → [ç]/\_tʃ

katihchish → katiçtʃiʃ

## Vowels

	Short <sup>1</sup>		Long	Nasal <sup>2</sup>
	tense	lax		
<u>Close front</u>	i	ɪ	i:	ĩ:~ẽ:
<u>Close-mid back</u>	o	ʊ	o:	õ:
<u>Open central</u>	a	ə	a:	ã:

- <sup>Λ</sup> Lax vowels occur more often in closed syllables.<sup>[7]</sup> In traditional orthography, *u* usually indicates [ə] and *u* usually indicates [ʊ]. Exceptions include *pokoli* (*traditional*) for /pɔk.koli/, *imalakusi* for /ima:lakosi/. The traditional orthography doesn't distinguish lax and tense front vowels, instead it indicates /i:/ with e.
- <sup>Λ</sup> Nasal vowels are intrinsically long.

## Pitch

1. In Choctaw, very few words are distinguished only by pitch accent.<sup>[7]</sup> Nouns in Choctaw have pitch realization at the penultimate syllable or the ultimate syllable.<sup>[7]</sup> Verbs in Choctaw will have pitch realization at morphemes indicating tense, but sometimes, pitch directly precedes the tense morpheme.<sup>[7]</sup>

## Syllable structure

Syllables of Choctaw<sup>[8]</sup>

Syllable	Type	Example
V	Light	a.bih
CV	Light	no.sih
VV	Heavy	ii.chih
CVV	Heavy	pii.ni'
V	Heavy	a.chi'
CV	Heavy	ta.chi'
VC	Heavy	ish.ki'
CVC	Heavy	ha.bish.ko'
VVC	Super Heavy	óok.cha-cha
CVVC	Super Heavy	náaf.ka'
VC	Super Heavy	at
CVC	Super Heavy	ok.hish
*(C)VCC	Super Heavy	tablit.tapt
*CCV	Super Heavy	ski.tii.nnih

1. As is in the chart above, there are three syllable structure types in Choctaw: light, heavy, and super heavy. Possible syllables in Choctaw must contain at least one vowel of any quality.<sup>[9]</sup>
2. Syllables cannot end with a consonant clusters CC. However, there is an exception with the structure \*(C)VCC if a word in Choctaw ends with the suffix /-t/.<sup>[9]</sup>
3. Syllables do not begin with consonant clusters CC, but there is an exception in an initial /i-/ deletion, which results in a syllable \*CCV .<sup>[9]</sup>

## Rhythmic lengthening

- Rhythmic lengthening is the process of lengthening the vowel duration of an even-numbered CV syllable in Choctaw. However, vowels at the end of words are not permitted to undergo that process. Also, if an even-numbered syllable is a verbal prefixes class I or III, the affix's vowel may not undergo lengthening, and the same holds true for noun prefixes class III as well.<sup>[10]</sup>

CV-CV-CVC → CV-CV:-CVC

salahatok → sala:hatok

## Smallest possible word

- The smallest possible word in Choctaw must contain either two short vowels or one long vowel.<sup>[8]</sup>
- a:t
- /A-/ insertion: there are verbs with only one short vowel in their roots. Without an affix attached to the verb root, the verbs become impossible utterances because Choctaw requires either two short vowel or a long vowel for a word to be formed. An initial A- prefix is thus attached to the root of the verb.<sup>[11]</sup>
- \*bih → a-bih

## Phonological processes

### Glide insertion

- When a verb root ends with a long vowel, a glide /w/ or /j/ is inserted after the long vowel.<sup>[12]</sup>
- $\emptyset \rightarrow /wa/ | V: \underline{\hspace{1cm}}$

  - Where V: is oo
  - boo-a-h → bóowah

- $\emptyset \rightarrow /ja/ | V: \underline{\hspace{1cm}}$

  - Where V: can be either ii or aa
  - talaa-a-h → talaayah

### /i-/ deletion

- In Choctaw, there is a group of nouns which contain an initial /i-/ that encodes for 3rd person possession. It may be deleted, but if the /i/ is part of a VC syllable structure, the C is also deleted, because the resulting CCV syllable is rarely a permissible syllable structure at the onset of words.<sup>[13]</sup>

$/i/ \rightarrow \emptyset | \# \underline{\hspace{1cm}}$   
 Part 1: /i + C/ →  $\emptyset + /C/ | \# \underline{\hspace{1cm}}$   
 Part 2: / $\emptyset + C/ \rightarrow \emptyset | \# \underline{\hspace{1cm}}$   
 ippókní' → ppókní' → pókní'

### /-l-/ infix assimilation

- The verbal infix /l/ is pronounced /h, ch, or ɬ/ when /l/ precedes a voiceless consonant.<sup>[14]</sup>

$l \rightarrow \{h, tʃ, ɬ\} / _C_{[-\text{voice}]}$   
 ho-l-tinah → ho-ɬ-tinah

## Phonological processes of the suffix /-li/

- There are several assimilation processes that occur with the suffix /-li/. When the verbal suffix /-li/ is preceded by /f/ /ʃ/ /h/ /m/ /n/ or /w/, the /l/ assimilates to the corresponding consonant that precedes it.<sup>[15]</sup> Also, the verbal suffix /-li/ is preceded by the consonant /b/, the /l/ is realized as /b/.<sup>[15]</sup> Third, when the verbal suffix /-li/ is preceded by the consonant /p/, the /p/ is pronounced as /b/.<sup>[15]</sup> Lastly, when the verbal suffix /-li/ is preceded by the consonant /t/, the /t/ is pronounced as /l/.<sup>[15]</sup>

/l/ → /f, ʃ, h, m, n, w/ | /f, ʃ, h, m, n, w/ \_\_\_\_\_  
 /kobaf-li-h/ → kobaaffih

/l/ → /b/ | /b/ \_\_\_\_\_  
 /atob-li-h/ → atobbih

/p/ → /b/ | /b/ \_\_\_\_\_  
 /tap-li-h/ → tablih

/t/ → /l/ | \_\_\_\_\_ /l/  
 /palhat-li-h/ → pallalih

- There are two deletion processes that occur with the suffix /-li/. If the verbal suffix /-li/ precedes the verbal suffix /-tʃi/, the suffix /-li/ may be deleted if the resulting syllable, after deletion, is a consonant cluster.<sup>[16]</sup> The other process occurs when the verbal suffix /-li/ precedes the suffix /-t/, which results with the suffix /-li/ being sometimes deleted if the syllable /-li/ has not already gone under phonological processes as described above.<sup>[17]</sup>

/li/ → Ø | \_\_\_\_\_ /tʃi/  
 balii-li-chi-h → balii-chi-h

/li/ → Ø | \_\_\_\_\_ /t/  
 balii-li--h → balii-t

## Schwa insertion

- Schwa insertion: when a glottal fricative /h/ or a velar stop /k/ precedes a voiced consonant within a consonant cluster, a schwa /ə/ is inserted to break up the consonant cluster.<sup>[18]</sup>

Ø → /ə/ | /h/ \_\_\_\_\_ [+voiced] consonant  
 Ø → /ə/ | /k/ \_\_\_\_\_ [+voiced] consonant  
 'ahnih' → /ahənih/

## Vowel deletion

- Vowel deletion is the process of a short vowel being deleted at a morpheme boundary. It occurs when an affix containing a short vowel at the morpheme boundary binds to a word that also contains a short vowel at the morpheme boundary.<sup>[19]</sup>

- For most vowel deletion cases, the preceding short vowel is deleted at the morpheme boundary.<sup>[19]</sup>

v → Ø | \_\_\_\_\_ v  
 /balii-i-aatʃi-h/ → baliiaatʃi-h

1. If a class II suffix attaches to a word that results with two short vowels occurring together, the short vowel that follows the class II suffix is deleted.<sup>[19]</sup>

$$V \rightarrow \emptyset / V \underline{\quad}$$

/sa-ibaa-waʃooah/ → sabaa-waʃooah

## Morphology and grammar

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### Verbal morphology

Choctaw verbs display a wide range of inflectional and derivational morphology. In Choctaw, the category of verb may also include words that would be categorized as adjectives or quantifiers in English. Verbs may be preceded by up to three prefixes and followed by as many as five suffixes. In addition, verb roots may contain infixes that convey aspectual information.

### Verb prefixes

The verbal prefixes convey information about the arguments of the verb: how many there are and their person and number features. The prefixes can be divided into three sorts: agreement markers, applicative markers, and anaphors (reflexives and reciprocals). The prefixes occur in the following order: agreement-anaphor-applicative-verb stem.

### Agreement affixes

The agreement affixes are shown in the following chart. The only suffix among the personal agreement markers is the first-person singular class I agreement marker /-li/. Third-person is completely unmarked for class I and class II agreement arguments and never indicates number.<sup>[20]</sup>

person markers			class I			class II		class III		class N		imperative				
			+s	+C	+V	+C/i	+a/o	+C	+V	+C	+V	+C	+V			
first-person	singular	initial	-li			sa-	si-	a-	am-	ak-		n/a				
		medial						-sa-	-sam-							
	paucal		ii-		il-	pi-		pi-	pim-	kii-	kil-					
	plural					hapi-		hapि-	hapim-							
second-person	singular		is-	ish-		chi-		chi-	chim-	chik-		∅				
	plural		has-	hash-		hachi-		hachi-	hachim-	hachik-		ho-	oh-			
third-person			∅			∅		i-	im-	ik-						

Some authors (Ulrich 1986, Davies, 1986) refer to class I as actor or nominative, class II as patient or accusative and class III as dative. Broadwell prefers the neutral numbered labels because the actual use of the affixes is more complex. This type of morphology is generally referred to as active-stative and polypersonal agreement.

Class I affixes always indicate the subject of the verb. Class II prefixes usually indicate direct object of active verbs and the subject of stative verbs. Class III prefixes indicate the indirect object of active verbs. A small set of stative psychological verbs have class III agreement subjectsthe direct object; an even smaller set of stative verbs dealing primarily with affect, communication and intimacy have class III direct object.

## Active verbs

As the chart above shows, there is no person-number agreement for third person arguments. Consider the following paradigms:

hablitok ("kicked", past tense)

DIRECT OBJECT SUBJECT		first-person			second-person		third-person
		singular	paucal	plural	singular	plural	
first-person	singular	<i>ili-habli-li-tok</i> <sup>1</sup> 'I kicked myself'	<i>pi-habli-li-tok</i> 'I kicked us (few)'	<i>hapi-habli-li-tok</i> 'I kicked us (all)'	<i>chi-habli-li-tok</i> 'I kicked you'	<i>hachi-habli-li-tok</i> 'I kicked you (pl.)'	<i>habli-li-tok</i> 'I kicked her/him/it/them'
	plural	<i>ii-sa-habli-tok</i> 'we kicked me'	<i>il-ili-habli-tok</i> <sup>1</sup> 'we kicked ourselves'		<i>ii-chi-habli-tok</i> 'we kicked you'	<i>ii-hachi-habli-tok</i> 'we kicked you (pl.)'	<i>ii-habli-tok</i> 'we kicked her/him/it/them'
second-person	singular	<i>is-sa-habli-tok</i> 'you kicked me'	<i>ish-pi-habli-tok</i> 'you kicked us (few)'	<i>ish-hapi-habli-tok</i> 'you kicked us (all)'	<i>ish-ili-habli-tok</i> <sup>1</sup> 'you kicked yourself'	<i>ish-hachi-habli-tok</i> 'you kicked you (pl.)'	<i>ish-habli-tok</i> 'you kicked her/him/it/them'
	plural	<i>has-sa-habli-tok</i> 'you (pl.) kicked me'	<i>hash-pi-habli-tok</i> 'you (pl.) kicked us (few)'	<i>hash-hapi-habli-tok</i> 'you (pl.) kicked us (all)'	<i>hash-chi-habli-tok</i> 'you (pl.) kicked you'	<i>hash-ili-habli-tok</i> <sup>1</sup> 'you (pl.) kicked yourselves'	<i>hash-habli-tok</i> 'you (pl.) kicked her/him/it/them'
third-person		<i>sa-habli-tok</i> 'she/he/it/they kicked me'	<i>pi-habli-tok</i> 'she/etc. kicked us (few)'	<i>hapi-habli-tok</i> 'she/etc. kicked us (all)'	<i>chi-habli-tok</i> 'she/etc. kicked you'	<i>hachi-habli-tok</i> 'she/etc. kicked you (pl.)'	<i>habli-tok</i> "she/etc. kicked her/him/it/them" <i>ili-habli-tok</i> <sup>1</sup> 'she/etc. kicked herself/etc.'

- When the subject and object refer to the same thing or person (coreference), the reflexive *ili-* prefix is mandatory and used in place of the coreferent object.

Transitive active verbs seemingly with class III direct objects:

- *Am-anoli-tok* 'She/he/it/they told me.'
- *Chim-anoli-tok* 'She/he/it/they told you.'
- *Im-anoli-tok* 'She/he/it/they told him/her/it/them.'
- *Pim-anoli-tok* 'She/he/it/they told us.'
- *Hachim-anoli-tok* 'She/he/it/they told y'all.'

When a transitive verb occurs with more than one agreement prefix, I prefixes precede II and III prefixes:

*Iichip ísatok.*

li-chi-písa-tok  
1pl-2sII-see⟨ NGR ⟩ -PT  
'We saw you.'

*Ishpimanoolitok.*  
Ish-pim-anooli-tok.  
2sI-1pIII-tell-PT  
'You told us.'

For intransitive verbs, the subjects of active verbs typically have class I agreement. Because third-person objects are unmarked, intransitive active verbs are indistinguishable in form from transitive active verbs with a third-person direct object.

## Stative verbs

The subjects of stative verbs typically have II agreement. A small set of psychological verbs have subjects with class III agreement.<sup>[21]</sup>

*Baliililitok.*  
Baliili-li-tok  
run-1sI-PT  
'I ran.'

*Saniyah.*  
Sa-niya-h.  
1sII-fat-TNS  
'I am fat.'

*apannah.*  
a-ponna-h.  
1sIII-skilled-TNS  
'I am skilled.'

## Negatives

The set of agreement markers labelled N above is used with negatives.<sup>[22]</sup> Negation is multiply marked, requiring that an agreement marker from the N set replace the ordinary I agreement, the verb appear in the lengthened grade (see discussion below), and that the suffix /-o(k)-/ follow the verb, with deletion of the preceding final vowel. The optional suffix /-kii/ may be added after /-o(k)-/. Consider the following example:

- *Akíiyokiittook.*
- *Ak-íiya-o-kii-ttook*
- *1sN-go⟨ LGR ⟩ -NEG-NEG-DPAST*
- 'I did not go.'

Compare this with the affirmative counterpart:

- *Iyalittook*
- *Iya-li-ttook.*
- *go-1sI-DPAST*

- 'I went'.

To make this example negative, the 1sI suffix /-li/ is replaced by the 1sN prefix /ak-/; the verb root *iya* is lengthened and accented to yield *iiya*; the suffix /-o/ is added, the final vowel of *iiya* is deleted, and the suffix /-kii/ is added.

## Anaphoric prefixes

Reflexives are indicated with the /ili-/ prefix, and reciprocals with /itti-/:[23]

- *Ilipísalitok.*
- li-písa-li-tok.
- REFL-SEE{ NGR } -1SL-PT
- 'I saw myself'.

## Verb suffixes

While the verbal prefixes indicate relations between the verb and its arguments, the suffixes cover a wider semantic range, including information about valence, modality, tense and evidentiality.

The following examples show modal and tense suffixes like /-aachi<sub>i</sub>/ 'irrealis'(approximately equal to future), /-tok/ 'past tense', /-h/ 'default tenses':[24]

*Baliilih.*  
*Baliili-h.*  
 run-TNS  
 'She runs.'

*Baliilaach<sub>i</sub>h.*  
*Baliili-aachi<sub>i</sub>-h.*  
 run-IRR-TNS  
 'She will run.'

There are also suffixes that show evidentiality, or the source of evidence for a statement, as in the following pair:[25]

*Nipi' awashlihli.*  
*Nipi' awashli-hli*  
 meat fry-first:hand  
 'She fried the meat.' (I saw/heard/smelled her do it.)

*Nipi' awashlitokasha.*  
*Nipi' awashli-tok-asha*  
 meat fry-PT-guess  
 'She fried the meat.' (I guess)

There are also suffixes of illocutionary force which may indicate that the sentence is a question, an exclamation, or a command:[26]

*Awashlitoko?*

*Awashli-tok-o*

fry-PT-Q

'Did she fry it?'

*Chahta' siahokii!*

Chahta' si-a-h-okii

Choctaw 1sII-be-TNS-EXCL

'I'm Choctaw!' or 'I certainly am a Choctaw!'

## Verbal infixes

Choctaw verb stems have various infixes that indicate their aspect.<sup>[27]</sup> These stem variants are traditionally referred to as 'grades'. The table below shows the grades of Choctaw, along with their main usage.

Name of Grade	How it is formed	When it is used
n-grade	infix n in the next to last (penultimate) syllable; put accent on this syllable	to show that the action is durative (lasts some definite length of time)
l-grade	put accent on next to last (penultimate) syllable; lengthen the vowel if the syllable is open	before a few common suffixes, such as the negative /-o(k)/ and the switch-reference markers /-cha/ and /-na/
hn-grade	insert a new syllable /-h $\underline{v}$ / after the (original) next to last (penultimate) syllable. $\underline{v}$ is a nasalized copy of the vowel that precedes it.	to show that the action of the verb repeats
y-grade	insert -Vyy- before the next to last (penultimate) syllable	to show delayed inception
g-grade	formed by lengthening the penultimate vowel of the stem, accenting the antepenultimate vowel, and geminating the consonant that follows the antepenult.	to show delayed inception
h-grade	insert -h- after the penultimate vowel of the stem.	to show sudden action

Some examples that show the grades follow:

In this example the l-grade appears because of the suffixes /-na/ 'different subject' and /-o(k)/ 'negative':

*... lowat táahana falaamat akíiyokiitook.*

Iowa-t táaha-na falaama-t ak-íiya-o-kii-ttook

burn-ss complete< LGR >-DS return-ss 1sN-go< LGR >-NEG-NEG-DPAST

'... (the school) burned down and I didn't go back.'

The g-grade and y-grade typically get translated into English as "finally VERB-ed":

*Taloowah.*

Taloowa-h

sing-TNS

'He sang.'

*Tállóowah.*

Tálloowa-h

sing< GGR >-TNS

'He finally sang.'

The hn-grade is usually translated as 'kept on VERBing':

*Ohóbana nittak pókkooli' oshtattook.*  
Ohóba-na nittak pókkooli' oshta-ttook  
rain< HNCR >-DS day ten four-DPAST  
'It kept on raining for forty days.'

The h-grade is usually translated "just VERB-ed" or "VERB-ed for a short time":

*Nóhsih.*  
Nóhsih  
sleep< HGR >-TNS  
'He took a quick nap.'

## Nominal morphology

### Noun prefixes

Nouns have prefixes that show agreement with a possessor.<sup>[28]</sup> Agreement markers from class II are used on a lexically specified closed class of nouns, which includes many (but not all) of the kinship terms and body parts. This is the class that is generally labeled inalienable.

*sanoshkobo' 'my head'*  
sa-noshkobo'  
1sII-head

*chinoshkobo' 'your head'*  
chi-noshkobo'  
2sII-head

*noshkobo' 'his/her/its/their head'*  
noshkobo'  
head

*sashki' 'my mother'*  
sa-ishki'  
1sII-mother

*chishki' 'your mother'*  
chi-ishki'  
2sII-mother

Nouns that are not lexically specified for II agreement use the III agreement markers:

*əki' 'my father'*  
ə-ki'  
1sIII-father

*amofi' 'my dog'*  
am-ofi'  
1sIII-dog

Although systems of this type are generally described with the terms alienable and inalienable, this terminology is not particularly appropriate for Choctaw, since alienability implies a semantic distinction between types of nouns. The morphological distinction between nouns taking II agreement and III agreement in Choctaw only partly coincides with the semantic notion of alienability.

## Noun suffixes

Choctaw nouns can be followed by various determiner and case-marking suffixes, as in the following examples, where we see determiners such as /-ma/ 'that', /-pa/ 'this', and /-akoo/ 'contrast' and case-markers /-(y)at/ 'nominative' and /-(y)ə/ 'accusative':<sup>[29]</sup>

*alla' naknimat*  
alla' nakni-m-at  
child male-that-NOM  
'that boy (nominative)'

*Hoshiit itti chaahamako obiniilih.*  
Hoshi'-at itti' chaaha-m-ako ə-biniili-h  
bird-NOM tree tall-that-CNTR:ACC SUPERESSIVE-SIT-TNS  
'The bird is sitting on that tall tree.' (Not on the short one.)

The last example shows that nasalizing the last vowel of the preceding N is a common way to show the accusative case.

## Word order and case marking

The simplest sentences in Choctaw consist of a verb and a tense marker, as in the following examples:<sup>[30]</sup>

*obatok.*  
oba-tok  
rain-PT  
'It rained.'

*Niyah.*  
niya-h  
fat-TNS  
'She/he/it is fat, they are fat.'

*Písatok.*  
písa-tok  
see{NGR}-PT  
'She/he/it/they saw her/him/it/them.'

As these examples show, there are no obligatory noun phrases in a Choctaw sentence, nor is there any verbal agreement that indicates a third person subject or object. There is no indication of grammatical gender, and for third person arguments there is no indication of number. (There are, however, some verbs with suppletive forms that indicate the number of a subject or object, e.g. iyah 'to go (sg.)', ittiyaachih 'to go (du.)', and ilhkolih 'to go (pl)').

When there is an overt subject, it is obligatorily marked with the nominative case /-at/. Subjects precede the verb

*Hoshiyat apatok.*  
hoshi'-at apa-tok  
bird-NOM eat-PT  
'The birds ate them.'

When there is an overt object, it is optionally marked with the accusative case /-ə/

*Hoshiyat shoshi(-ya) apatok.*  
hoshi'-at shoshi'(-ə) apa-tok.  
bird-NOM bug-(ACC) eat-PT  
'The birds ate the bugs.'

The Choctaw sentence is normally verb-final, and so the head of the sentence is last.

Some other phrases in Choctaw also have their head at the end. Possessors precede the possessed noun in the Noun Phrase:

*ofi' hohchifo'*  
dog name  
'the dog's name'

Choctaw has postpositional phrases with the postposition after its object:

*tamaaha' bilika*  
town near  
'near a town'

## Examples

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Some common Choctaw phrases (written in the "Modern" orthography):

- Choctaw: *Chahta*
- hi: *Halito!*
- See you later!: *Chi pisa la chike!*
- number: *holhtina/holhtini*
- Thank you: *Yakoke*
- What is your name?: *Chi hohchifo yat nanta?*
- My name is...: *Sa hohchifo yat...*
- yes: *ə*
- no: *kíyo*
- okay: *ohmi*
- I don't understand.: *Ak akostiníncho.*
- I don't know.: *Ak ikháno.*
- Do you speak Choctaw?: *Chahta imanompa ish anompolá hinla hə?*
- What is that?: *Yammat nanta?*

Other Choctaw words:

- Cherokee: *Chalaki*
- Chickasaw: *Chickashsha*

- Seminole: *Siminóli*
- Creek/Muskogee: *Maskóki*
- today: *himak nittak*
- tonight: *himak ninak*
- tomorrow: *onnakma*
- yesterday: *piláshásh*
- month: *hashi*
- year/2009: *affami/talhípa sippokni toklo akochcha chakkali*
- house: *chokka*
- school: *holisso ápisa*
- cat: *katos*
- dog: *ofi*
- cow: *wák*
- horse: *issoba/soba*

Counting to twenty:

- one: *achoffa*
- two: *toklo*
- three: *tochchína*
- four: *oshta*
- five: *talhlhapi*
- six: *hannali*
- seven: *otoklo*
- eight: *otochchina*
- nine: *chakkali*
- ten: *pokkoli*
- eleven: *awahachoffa*
- twelve: *awahtoklo*
- thirteen: *awahtochchina*
- fourteen: *awahoshta*
- fifteen: *awahtalhlhapi*
- sixteen: *awahhannali*
- seventeen: *awah~~o~~toklo*
- eighteen: *awahuntochchina*
- nineteen: *abichakkali*
- twenty: *pokkoli toklo*

At "Native Nashville" web [5] ([https://web.archive.org/web/20120211172945/http://www.nativenashville.com/language/tutor\\_chata.php](https://web.archive.org/web/20120211172945/http://www.nativenashville.com/language/tutor_chata.php)), there is an Online Choctaw Language Tutor, with Pronunciation Guide and four lessons: Small Talk, Animals, Food and Numbers.

## See also

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- [Choctaw Code Talkers](#)

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## External links

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